

# The Perfect Home for Your Stock

*It is a concept that is becoming a win-win situation around New Zealand's rural countryside both for farmers and for their stock.*

Greenhouse-type livestock covers, or animal shelters, in the past several years, have evolved quickly to address the different environment livestock require, compared to the original 'greenhouse' plant occupants.

While most of the larger structures are designed and used as standoff shelters for dairy herds, Christchurch company, FlexiTunnel pioneered a specific calf-rearing concept for young dairy calves. It has now been used successfully for over eight years and consists of a specially designed tunnel house that can be assembled in a day. It can also be very simply shifted or dismantled and stored away after a season.

Calves are kept in easily assembled yards separated into pens for 10 to 20 animals that can be shifted and changed as required. Each pen provides about 2 square meters of floor space per animal, in which calves can freely move between the equally divided inside and outside areas.

By providing access to both the inside and outside environment of a so called "Patio System" gives the animals the benefit of both adequate shelter as well as unrestricted exposure to sunshine; therefore allowing for essential vitamin D production gained from UV exposure.

For many farmers, shifting their calf rearing activities from open-ended implement or hay sheds to the purpose built tunnels results in greatly

improved growth rates and health benefits. The temperature on the inside of the tunnels can stay up to 10 degrees warmer than in conventional sheds and warmth cannot easily escape, therefore conserving the calves' body heat.

The sun's UV rays are able to reach into every corner of the bedding area, constantly sterilizing the deep litter (wood shavings, sawdust or bark mulch), thus preventing disease build-up and keeping the litter dry.

Ventilation is also a major factor. Stale and damp air stuck in sheds and shelters can cause major problems in animal health and without careful design can bring about a situation comparable to a plastic bag with animals in it. Manure gases (ammonia), condensation and heat can become trapped and the structure needs to be sufficiently ventilated.

FlexiTunnels have solved this problem in a simple but effective way. The animals will never be more than five meters away from the single side-opening, therefore guaranteeing ample ventilation in a perfect draft-free environment. No matter how large the facility, from a small 20 calves to an extensive 400 (or more) calf operation, the venting capacity always remains the same.

Farmers across New Zealand have used FlexiTunnels with great results for years and would simply not rear their calves any other way.

